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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000440

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SUBJECT: U.N./Government/Donors Meeting on the  
Zimbabwe Humanitarian Crisis

REF: (A) Harare 293 (WFP Expands Zimbabwe  
Distribution During January 2/10/03),  
(B) Harare 260 (UN/Donor/GOZ Meeting on the  
Zimbabwe Food Crisis dated 2/5/03);  
(C) Harare 217 (cable on SE Morris visit)

1. Summary: On February 24, Ambassador Sullivan, USAID Director Weisenfeld and AidOff attended the regular bi-weekly U.N.-sponsored meeting on the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe with concerned Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) and international donor country representatives. Meeting presentations focused on food distributions and pipelines, including the GOZ's Rural and Urban Public Works (cash-for-work) Program and its associated Grain Marketing Board food distribution system, and the status of on-going and future WFP operations in Zimbabwe. Additional discussions covered the status of the on-going national health and nutrition survey, other planned surveys and assessments, on-going supplementary child feeding programs, new donor contributions and the status of various policy issues related to the food crisis. Although much information was discussed, little of it was new or of substantive import. Nevertheless, the meeting remains a useful venue to maintain a direct donor/government dialogue on humanitarian issues. End Summary.

2. On February 24, Ambassador Sullivan, USAID Director Weisenfeld and AidOff attended the regular bi-weekly U.N.-sponsored meeting on the Zimbabwe humanitarian crisis with concerned government and international donor country representatives. The meeting was chaired by U.N. Humanitarian Co-ordinator (UNHC) for Zimbabwe (J. Victor Angelo), with country representatives from WHO, UNICEF, FAO and WFP. GOZ representatives included the Minister of Health and Child Welfare (M/H&CW), Dr. David Parirenyatwa, and senior-level representatives from the GOZ ministries of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare (M/PS,L&SW), Education, and Small Enterprise Development. Chiefs of Mission and associated Donor Agency Heads of most major bilateral donor countries to Zimbabwe also attended.

3. Following introductory comments, the meeting commenced with a prepared presentation, accompanied by a written handout, by the GOZ Director of Social Welfare (Mhishi) on the government's cash-for-work program and related GOZ Grain Marketing Board (GMB) food sales/distribution activities. This was the first time the GOZ described to the donors in any detail the mechanics of its food distribution programs. The presentation, however, explained the theory of the programs and did not address actual, on-the-ground experience with implementation or allegations of politicization or corruption. Highlights of the GOZ's presentation follow:

-A. Rural and Urban Public Works Program (RU-PWP):

- As explained by the GOZ representative, the purpose of the "cash-for-work" program is "to provide a quick response for the support of vulnerable households (HHs) and individuals through cash transfers for labor-intensive public works co-ordinated by local

authorities" to enable the beneficiaries to purchase food.

- The chronically ill, elderly and disabled receive free cash allowances to purchase food (see GMB distributions/sales system below); the able-bodied work for their cash/food. Separate registers for each of these two categories of beneficiaries are maintained at the local (village/ward/district) level.
- Benefiting HHs receive ZWD 1500 per month for 15 days of work (equivalent to 3 persons/HH working five days each per month). The amount is based on the official controlled price of maize (ZWD 560/kilogram), and the fact that this income is only meant to supplement other sources of income (and is not meant to satisfy total food requirements). Participants are paid weekly in urban areas, and monthly in rural areas.

- Both beneficiaries and projects are selected by traditional and conventional authorities at the local level. M/PS, L&SW provides monthly allocations to each district based on need, population estimates and drought intensity, as reflected in various past and on-going assessments. On average, approximately ZWD 1 million is provided to each ward in each district per month.

- To date, the program is operational in all 58 rural districts, and 26 urban areas of the country, benefiting approximately 1.3 million HHs on a monthly basis. The GOZ estimates that approximately double this number (2.7 million HHs) are eligible for participation in this program.

- No special food purchase arrangements are organized for program beneficiaries, i.e., "once they receive their allowance, they join everybody else to purchase food (via the GMB sales/distribution system below)."

#### -B. GMB Grain Distribution:

- The GMB grain distribution is headed a National Task Force, chaired by the Minister of National Security, N. Goche. This Task Force is responsible for government grain purchases/imports and allocation of available stocks to the different regions of the country.

- Grain distribution is decentralized through similar GMB and local government Task Forces at the provincial, district, ward and village levels.

- The distribution system varies for urban and rural areas. In urban areas, distribution flows from millers to retailers for subsequent sale to consumers through normal commercial channels.

Due to perceived problems with this system (e.g., alleged private sector hoarding, conditional sales and black marketeering), Mhishi stated that the GOZ is now looking at the formation of Food Distribution Committees to provide food directly to vulnerable urban HHs "to ensure transparency and accountability." [Note: In response to an FAO query on food availability in one Harare suburban area, Mhishi characterized the Harare area as a private sector "free-for-all" situation under which it was next to impossible to accurately trace food supplies.]

- In rural areas, grain is distributed through existing GMB depots and fixed and mobile "selling points," rather than through commercial channels. "Beneficiary" registers are maintained at the local (ward) level by local authorities. In response to a follow-up question, Mhishi noted that government program beneficiaries excluded beneficiaries also receiving food aid through WFP and other donor assistance.

- Mhishi described the major constraints to this system include:

- 1) inadequacy of grain supplies (leading to severe shortages, hoarding, black marketeering and other abuses noted above);
- 2) transport problems (delays in rail transport, WFP competition for available transport assets);
- 3) cash shortages (particularly to pay transporters); and
- 4) lack of GMB capacity to properly monitor system operations.

In response to a query on the status of the proposal that of the U.N's new Relief Information & Validation division assist the government in meeting these program monitoring requirements, Mhishi stated that

"this was part of a broader proposal that was still being considered."

14. The Director of Nutrition (M/H&CW) then provided a brief summary report on the status of the on-going national Nutritional/Expanded Immunization Program survey. Training was completed in late-January/early-February; data collection is complete in all districts, except Binga which is expected to be completed this week. Data entry is in progress in all districts, and is expected to be completed by end-February. Data analysis and report writing will be completed in early-March, with a final draft report expected o/a March 17. In response to a query from SCF/UK on the need for a more comprehensive "livelihoods" approach to vulnerability assessment (as opposed to relying too heavily on nutrition data alone), the Director noted that this survey was being closely co-ordinated with on-going Vulnerability Assessment Committee work, which would complement the nutrition survey results with other household-level data.

15. This discussion was followed by a presentation by WFP Country Representative Farrell summarizing, the status and future situation of the on-going international food assistance program for Zimbabwe. Most of this information was the same as that reported in ref. A. Additional highlights included:

- Despite a slower than hoped for start, operations were generally going well now, with a solid program pipeline projected through April 2003.
- WFP projects a shortfall of 73,260 MT in May and June (approximately half of which is cereals). This projection, however, was disputed as not adequately reflecting reduced beneficiary requirements as a result of the March/April harvest. Farrell's response was that while current beneficiary numbers may decrease during this period, additional allocations would be required for heretofore uncovered groups, such as the urban poor and populations in commercial farming areas that were becoming increasingly vulnerable. Farrell also indicated that WFP would continue to reevaluate its projected numbers of beneficiaries over the coming months.
- Despite a current serious bottleneck at the Beitbridge border post (due to GOZ road/parking rehabilitation work), WFP still expected to be able to meet its import targets and pipeline requirements.
- A major problem was lack of (government) market supplies of food in rural areas; in many areas, international food aid was becoming the "vast majority" of available supplies. In this regard, Farrell noted the need for more specific and detailed information on GOZ/GMB distributions and future import plans and schedules. In response, the GOZ noted that while we could "count on" government figures already provided through April 2003, they had no reliable information at present on GOZ imports beyond that time.
- The GOZ expressed their concern that there were no additional international aid supplies indicated beyond June 2003 (when the next "hungry season" begins).
- In response to the stated preference for wet/blanket (vs. dry ration) supplementary feeding for children by the M/H&CW, WFP indicated that it was starting to phase out its dry supplementary feeding ration over the next few months in response to the increased coverage (and preference) for wet/blanket supplementary feeding programs through bilateral NGO programs. In the course of this discussion, M/H&CW's Director of Nutrition stated that two UNICEF handouts on supplementary child feeding activities throughout the country were inaccurate (UNICEF maintains that they were compiled with full Ministry knowledge and participation).

16. Following these major presentations, the U.K. announced a new British Pound 5.35 million contribution to the Zimbabwe relief effort. Approximately British Pounds 4.1 million of this contribution would be used to help cover the costs of transporting Zimbabwe's share (64,000 MT) of the recent

100,000 MT South Africa contribution to the regional food crisis to Zimbabwe, with the balance of 1.25 million to be used by WFP for additional cereals. Thanking the British for this additional contribution, UNHC Angelo noted that the Norwegians were also contributing to the transport costs of this South Africa maize.

**17. Other Points:**

- In response to queries regarding the likely crop harvest prospects, the GOZ stated that reliable information on the current season harvest will not be available until the formal mid-season crop assessment is completed in March.
- In response to a British query following-up on various policy issues raised at prior meetings, the UNHC noted that the recent Economic Stimulus Package approved by government (see septels - documentation expected this week from the Ministry of Finance) partially addressed several salient issues such as the exchange rate, fuel prices, and farmer producer prices for controlled food commodities. The UNHC also noted that discussions were on-going on other issues (e.g., GMB monopoly, joint monitoring of aid, etc.).
- The UNHC also made the following announcements: the Special U.N. Envoys' recent trip report focusing on HIV/AIDS impacts on the food crisis is available (see reftel C); no start date has yet been set for the joint GOZ/UN commercial farming area survey, although the questionnaire to be used has been agreed upon; a Humanitarian Principles workshop proposed for last week had been postponed due to the unavailability of key GOZ participants; and that a group was working on plans for a major Humanitarian Roundtable for Zimbabwe for March/April 2003.
- Finally, the UNHC noted that future such joint UN/GOZ/Donor Meetings would be held every three weeks (instead of bi-monthly), with the next meeting scheduled for March 17.

**18. Comment:** While this meeting demonstrated an improved flow of information, much of what was discussed was already known by most participants, with little new information of any serious import discussed. However, the meeting's dynamics suggest an increased ease and familiarity of all parties with each other and with the issues on the table. It remains to be seen, however, if the proposed strategy of less frequent such meetings will produce any more productive results. SULLIVAN